

17 November 1957

(EXCERPT)

College News Conference at 4:00 p.m. over WMAL-TV (Washington) and the ABC Television Network:

Guest: Trevor Gardner, Missile and Rocket expert, former Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Research and Development.

Moderator: Ruth Hagy.

Panel of College Students.

THE PARTICIPANTS WERE SEEN ON THE TV SCREEN, SEATED AT TABLES IN THE STUDIO.

QUESTION: (read by Miss Hagy) "Do you believe the failure of the President's advisors to keep him informed about our missile-satellite program is responsible for our failure to stay ahead of the Russians?"

GARDNER: "Miss Hagy, it's not clear to me whether or not we had the information. I think there are three parts to this question. The first part, if I could amplify it a little bit, is were we in fact taken by surprise by Sputniks I and II? If we were taken by surprise, then certainly the President will want to get busy at the task of finding out why, and finding out why our intelligence agencies were not on the job, if in fact they were not. This also would mean that we are literally planning our defense expenditures and the security of our country in a vacuum. I would hate to think that we were taken completely by surprise.

"Now if we had substantive and factual intelligence, which would indicate that one might have expected something like Sputnik I and Sputnik II roughly when they occurred, if that intelligence was available, then I think we have two questions to ask ourselves as citizens and supporters of the President. I think we have to say, first of all, was this intelligence, if it existed, kept from the President? If it was, then I think the President has the clear responsibility to this country and to the Congress for our security's sake to identify the individuals who kept this information from him or refused to interpret it for him, and eliminate them from the process of government.

"If, on the other hand, the President had this information, one can only conclude that it was not properly interpreted for him, because I can't conceive of the actions of the past two years by the Defense Department having been permitted, if the President had the full knowledge that Sputnik I and II could occur when they did."

QUESTION: "Then, Mr. Gardner, you would say that the President is somewhat a victim of his advisors?"

GARDNER: "I think that possibility definitely exists."

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QUESTION: "Would you say the results of some difficulty within the intelligence network itself -- specifically, the CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY?"

GARDNER: "I wouldn't make that statement, Mr. Wedgeworth. I'd rather not comment specifically about the quality of our intelligence. I just raised the reasonable possibilities that any thinking citizen must certainly ask himself, and they are serious."

HAGY: "Well, how would you recommend the country go about finding out whether the Central Intelligence Agency or other intelligence sources are functioning properly or not, since this is all classified information?"

GARDNER: "Perhaps it was classified information before Sputnik I and II. I'm not sure that it is now or should be. I think that the voters of the country, and specifically the Congress, have a need to know and a right to know what the status of our intelligence knowledge concerning the Russians was and is today."

QUESTION: "Don't you think, Mr. Gardner, then that perhaps a congressional investigating committee should find this out for the Americans?"

GARDNER: "This is certainly one way of getting about it."

QUESTION: "Well, Mr. Gardner, I think perhaps it is your duty to meet someone in the Senate or someone in the Congress and ask them to do this. Have you considered this?"

GARDNER: "As a private citizen, Miss Berman, I'm alarmed about our security as a result of the implications of Sputnik I and II, and I'm available any hour of the day or night, seven days a week, to be responsive to the needs of the country, to talk to Congressional committees or anyone else if I have knowledge that bears on the question."

QUESTION: "Do you think the Johnson Committee that is being set up now is a step in the right direction of informing the public?"

GARDNER: "I definitely do, if they consider that their function."

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QUESTION: "Mr. Gardner, to move on to another area, just how significant militarily do you think the two Russian Sputniks are?"

GARDNER: "I think the intelligence implications of the Russian Sputnik have military significance, and I think we've covered that earlier. We either do or don't know what the Russians are doing. If we don't know, they have military significance and they tell us a lot about their military potential in missiles. If you couple Sputnik I and II, which, much as we would like to wish they might go away, they won't--and to the best of my knowledge, still circling the earth--if you couple that with the statements of the Russians that they have an ICBM, I think they're full of military bad news for this country and bring me to a

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state of mind where I believe that we have a full scale national emergency on our hands, whether we realize it or not."

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QUESTION: "Mr. Gardner, would you be in favor of increased information to the public as to our state of development, as far as the missile program is concerned?"

GARDNER: "Yes, Miss Berman--and no. This is a poor way to answer your question. If it were easy, you'd get a short answer--simply yes. The problem of dissemination of information is that one also makes available to a potential enemy, perhaps, facts which will be helpful to him. Offsetting that, I might say that very little about what we think are secrets are really secrets, and perhaps after Sputniks I and II many of the secrets which we thought were top secrets are really in the public and Russian domain. So that yes, the public should be informed about a great deal more than they are."